



## **King County**

### **Department of Community and Human Services**

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## **DRAFT PROCUREMENT PLAN**

### **Veterans and Human Services Levy: 1.3**

#### **Dedicated Telephone Resource for Veterans**

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#### **1. Goal (Overarching Investment Strategy)**

The Veterans and Human Services Levy Service Improvement Plan (SIP) set a goal of enhancing access to services for veterans and their families (page 16 of SIP).

#### **2. Objective (Specific Investment Strategy)**

Provide a dedicated telephone resource for veterans to increase access to information about services (page 17 of SIP).

#### **3. Population Focus**

This program prioritizes veterans and their families in King County. This is one of the primary target populations of the Veterans and Human Services Levy (Levy). The clients to be served by this phone resource are typically in need of information about the unique services and resources available to them as veterans, including employment assistance, veterans benefits, counseling, housing assistance or assistance with emergency needs, in addition to information about other local community resources.

#### **4. Need for Services**

It is extremely important for veterans to have easy access to information about the wide array of services available to them and their families. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for many veterans to navigate the complex landscape of veterans' organizations and other agencies to receive help for the myriad problems they may be facing. Many helpful services exist that are either specifically for veterans or are services veterans might utilize to help support them and their families. Often however it is difficult for veterans to make connections to these services and receive assistance as they cope with major life changes, such as deployment or the transition back to civilian life. The families of National Guard members may be in particular need of veteran or other community resources as they struggle with the loss of income of the deployed family member.

As stated by The Crisis Clinic, a person who needs to access a community service can often make 10-12 calls before reaching the right agency.<sup>1</sup> A dedicated telephone line would be a direct and tangible service that every veteran can use. With just one call, a veteran could be connected to the correct agency almost immediately. Not only could the client be served, but the agencies could also receive fewer errant calls, as people could be matched more efficiently with the services they are seeking.

There currently exist telephone information lines for veterans and for others in need, but these services are not necessarily meeting the specific needs of the veteran population within King County. Below you will find more information about existing telephone information lines.

- The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) operates a telephone line to assist veterans from across the state with a variety of issues, but this line does not currently have specialized expertise on services available in King County. This line operates during regular business hours.<sup>2</sup>
- The Crisis Clinic (also known as “2-1-1”) provides information and referral within King County, but does not have expertise on services available to veterans. This line operates during regular business hours to connect people with services and to assist people interested in volunteering or donating goods. The Crisis Clinic also hosts a 24-hour toll-free crisis hotline for those with immediate counseling needs.<sup>3</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a 24-hour crisis and suicide prevention hotline (1-800-273-TALK), which is also highlighted on the WDVA Web site. To provide this service, the VA partnered with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Veterans calling this line have free access to trained counselors to talk through their problems.<sup>4</sup>
- Military OneSource, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, provides phone and online assistance to Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard service members and their families across the country and covers an array of topics, including career, deployment, legal, relationship, and parenting issues. Callers will speak with a “master’s level consultant, trained to offer confidential support and practical solutions”. The interactive Web site also includes information on many topics, as well as interactive tools, such as financial calculators, videos, and discussion boards.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Crisis Clinic has provided a community information line in King County since the 1970s. For more information, see: <http://www.crisisclinic.org/main.html>

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.dva.wa.gov/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.crisisclinic.org/main.html>

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.militaryonesource.com/skins/MOS/home.aspx>

Because these existing services each provide a portion but not all of the services desired in a phone resource line the SIP identified the need for an approach to information and referral tailored to King County's veterans and their families.

## **5. Funds Available**

From 2007 to 2011, this activity has been allocated \$100,000 each year, for a total of \$500,000. Because this activity will be starting up in 2009, funds available annually for 2009 – 2011 are higher than \$100,000. The maximum budget available for this project is included below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Veterans Levy Funds</b>
2009	\$166,667
2010	\$166,667
2011	\$166,666

It is anticipated that expenses could likely be higher in the first year of the project because of required cross training and costs of technical enhancements, and less once key elements of the project are implemented. It will be possible to adjust the funds available and use more of the funds in 2009 if necessary.

## **6. Program Description**

The priority population for this phone resource is veterans and their family members, including members of the National Guard, Reserves, and Coast Guard who reside in King County. The goal is to increase access to information about locally available services including those designed specifically for active duty military personnel and veterans, as well as general community resources.

It is expected that agencies providing information to residents of King County, primarily the Crisis Clinic 2-1-1- Community Information Line and the WDVA will collaborate to increase their knowledge of both services specifically for veterans and general community resources. These agencies will need to formalize their relationship to improve phone referral services available to veterans and their families.

While interagency collaboration may be configured in a number of ways, it is anticipated it will include sharing resource information, cross training staff, and identification of liaisons at each agency who participate in regular ongoing collaboration meetings. A Request for Qualifications will be conducted to solicit collaborative proposals to provide services to this population however, it is expected that one agency will be lead and ultimately responsible for implementing this activity. The final configuration of the collaboration will be negotiated directly with the contracting agency according to best practices, past experience, and emphasis on program outcomes.

In order to achieve the primary goal of this program, the contracting agency in collaboration with existing community services will be asked to provide the following. Activities shall include, but are not limited to:

1. A live person to respond to the call trained or knowledgeable of the needs of veterans and their families, including re-entry issues of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and deployment issues in addition to general community resources.
2. Quality and in-depth knowledge of veteran-specific resources and other general community resources available in King County
3. Enhanced knowledge of available veterans' and general community resources, so callers can receive, when possible, multiple referral options (including a name, phone number, Web site, and e-mail address, if available)
4. Enhanced database that includes resources available specifically to veterans, and other community resources.
5. Enhanced knowledge in the community of phone lines through which veterans and their families can access services.
6. Follow-up to make connections and ensure appropriate service provision
7. Ongoing training of phone line staff and maintenance of resource database.

## **7. Coordination/Partnerships and Alignment Within and Across Systems**

Because telephone services currently exist in King County, coordination and program alignment is encouraged across these various systems that serve veterans and their families. The services provided by WDVA, 2-1-1, the VA, and Military OneSource are detailed in Section 4 (Need for Services) of this procurement plan. It is likely that the best method for providing this specific telephone resource will involve a partnership of agencies. King County encourages multiple agencies to creatively combine resources and expertise to submit a joint proposal including details about how they might share responsibilities for providing information on veteran specific services and other community resources to veterans and their families throughout King County. The participating agencies will be required to formalize their relationship through a memorandum of agreement to describe how resources and services such as staff training, technical assistance and ongoing support will be shared, and to designate a lead agency.

## **8. Timeline**

The King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) will release a Request for Qualifications to the community in order to identify an acceptable collaborative model and select the lead agency for the veterans' phone resource project. Once the lead provider is selected, there may be training and start-up activities required before services can begin, thus anticipating that clients will begin receiving services in February 2009.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date</b>
Request for Qualifications ; Select lead phone resource provider & collaborative service model	December 2008
Staff training begins	February 2009
Levy-funded phone resource begins serving clients	March 2009

## **9. Selection of Projects/Activities**

DCHS contracts with community-based organizations to provide services, by utilizing periodic competitive procurement processes to select contract partners. King County will distribute a Request for Qualifications to select the lead agency and other agencies to participate in the veteran phone resource according to the timeline highlighted above. It is important that the agency have some experience with and knowledge of telephone information lines and services for veterans so that the Levy funds are used to build upon existing services.

## **10. Geographic coverage**

The dedicated telephone resource will be available to veterans and their families throughout King County and will refer callers to services countywide.

## **11. Funding/Resource Leverage**

This phone resource for veterans is an example of a program, expanding upon an existing foundation of similar services. It is hoped that the agency selected to function as lead for this telephone resource will have experience with telephone information lines and/or veterans services and will be using Levy funds to enhance already existing services.

It is expected, that the agency will utilize and leverage information and resources that are currently available from a variety of other sources, but that may not necessarily be centralized for easy access to clients in need. As stated earlier, partnerships and collaboration across systems is encouraged, and may actually enhance the services offered. There are a number of resources available to veterans, such as those highlighted in Section 4 (Need for Services) of this procurement plan, and this phone service should refer to those other resources for ideas, assistance, information and collaborative opportunities that might be useful to the population being served.

## **12. Evidence-based Best Practices**

Studies have shown that dedicated telephone information lines positively impact the service delivery community and the clients in need by decreasing the number of errant calls to service providers (saving time for clients and saving resources for providers) and by improving the distribution of services by referring clients to services that are close to home. Guidelines for developing and managing an information and referral service (I&R) for veterans are not available. Information and referral (I&A) services have existed for several decades however, and providers in this profession are well organized and have a nationwide organization, The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). With a goal to improve access to services for all people through information and referral, this nationwide group has existed since 1973 and administers an accreditation program, hosts a membership association, and provides training, support, and technical assistance.

The organization has developed twenty-seven standards defining expected practices within the field and providing guidelines that communities or other jurisdictions can use when they develop an I&R program to meet the needs of their people. The standards are available at the following address:

<http://www.airs.org/documents/AIRS%20Standards%20Version%205.2.pdf>

The accreditation process is a lengthy, and while some standards, such as those related to disaster preparedness, would not be important for agencies providing information and referral services to veterans and their families to meet, others are. Some of the most relevant categories of standards for an agency interested in providing I&R services to veterans include the following:

Service Delivery such as Referral Provision, Advocacy / Intervention and Follow-up

Resource Database providing guidelines for data management

Reports and Measures such as Data Collection and Data Analysis and Reporting

Cooperative Relationships within the Local I&R and Service Delivery System

While it may not be practical to require contract partners to become AIRS certified, this resource may provide helpful ideas and information on how to best provide a dedicated phone resource for veterans in King County.<sup>6</sup>

### **13. Disproportionality Reduction Strategy**

2008 data from the King County Veterans' Program (KCVP) shows that the program is serving a similar number of African American (43%) and Caucasian (47%) clients, with smaller numbers of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian clients (totaling less than 10%). With over 50 percent of its clients coming from racial and ethnic minority communities, KCVP has demonstrated its ability work appropriately and effectively with diverse groups of veterans.

It is expected that the population served by this dedicated phone resource will be similar to that of KCVP. This service data shows that veterans in need of services in King County are disproportionately from the African American community. The contract partners are encouraged to have on staff counselors from minority communities and the ability to assist veterans or their families for whom English is a second language. It will also be important to distribute information on the phone resource(s) available to veterans to diverse communities.

### **14. Dismantling Systemic/Structural Racism**

KCVP has acknowledged that racism exists and that military policies and practices disproportionately affect active duty military personnel and veterans of color. Because of this, it is important that contract partners for this program consider these important issues as well.

It is expected that contract partners will work to dismantle systemic/structural racism by:

- Reviewing issues of racism and the resulting disproportionate number of veterans of color that are in need of services
- Reviewing operational policies and procedures to ensure that clients, staff, and community partners understand the effects of racism and disproportionality

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.airs.org/default.asp>

- Developing a procedure to include client and staff input in policies, procedures, and program development to address gaps, barriers, or inappropriate program practices relative to the cultural needs of the clients
- Establishing contacts and relationships with community providers that specialize in serving communities of color.

## **15. Cultural Competency**

With over half of the target population estimated to come from racial and ethnic minority communities, primarily African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities, it is important that the agency providing this service is culturally competent. Not only must the employees interact with a racially and ethnically diverse group, but they must also be able to work well with the veteran population. It is expected that the agency selected to provide this service will have strong recruitment processes that reach out to people from diverse backgrounds, and efforts will be made to recruit staff that reflect the population to be served. Contract partners should have strong programs for promoting cultural competency through continuing education opportunities and should also provide access to interpretation services if needed.

## **16. Outcomes**

2-1-1 King County collects a wide variety of demographics on its callers including veteran information. Additional information is collected if required by a particular contract such as caregiver services. Outcome information is also gathered through a 3 question survey administered to a 2% sample of callers.

While details of outcome measurement will be negotiated with the lead agency, given this activity's goal of increasing access to information about services, an important outcome is the number of veterans and families of veterans served. It is anticipated that during the first month after finalizing the contract, the lead agency will establish a baseline of service requests tracking the number of veterans and veteran's families calling to request information and referral to services. Once enhanced services to have been implemented, the agency will continue to track numbers of veterans and veteran's families requesting information and referral to services to compare to service levels prior to receipt of levy funding. Examples of the categories and types of information that may be requested by callers include crisis counseling, post traumatic stress disorder services, housing assistance, employment assistance, domestic violence, child care, deployment issues, etc.

## **17. Process and Outcome Evaluation**

The investment strategy focused on enhancing access to services for veterans and their families will be evaluated on both process and outcomes by evaluators in CSD. King County staff will work with the evaluators to measure the effect of the Levy on process issues such as startup activities, contracting processes, collaboration and system level changes that occur, and on the outcomes listed above. This evaluation will take place according to the evaluation plan established by the evaluation team in CSD.